

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 934
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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T JERUSALEM 1354

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, PEPR, IS, JO
SUBJ: AL QUDS' SEEKS LOUDER VOICE FOR WEST BANK/GAZA PALESTINIANS

REF: JERUSALEM 1353 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: AL QUDS EDITORS HAVE PLANNED A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN TO PROVOKE A PUBLIC DEBATE BY PALESTINIANS UNDER OCCUPATION OF THEIR POLITICAL PRIORITIES AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE PLO. PALESTINIAN UNITY AND PLO RIGHT TO REPRESENT WILL BE REAFFIRMED, BUT A LARGER ROLE WILL BE CLAIMED FOR WEST BANKERS AND GAZANS AS THE LARGEST PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY, PRESENT IN PALESTINE AND WITH RELEVANT EXPERIENCE. AN END TO THE OCCUPATION WILL BE TOP PRIORITY. IMMEDIATE MOTIVATION FOR CAMPAIGN WAS FEAR OF IMPOSITION OF BEGIN PLAN. SOME CONSULTATIONS HAVE PRECEDED EFFORT, BUT HOPE IS THAT MOVEMENT WILL RECEIVE BROAD SUPPORT OF THUS FAR SILENT MAJORITY AND, EVENTUALLY,
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SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF MAYORS. CONTACTS WITH EGYPT AND JORDAN DENIED. FIRM US LINE REGARDING ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL DESIRED.
END SUMMARY.

1. ON MAY 10, POLOFF MET WITH IBRAHIM DAIBIS WHO HAS BECOME UNOFFICIALLY THE CHIEF EDITORIAL WRITER OF AL QUDS, THE WEST BANK'S LARGEST ARABIC DAILY. AL QUDS HAS LONG PURSUED

A RELATIVELY MODERATE AND RELATIVELY PRO-JORDANIAN LINE. (ITS EDITOR-INOACHIEF MAHMOUD ABU ZALAF IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO RECEIVE A SUBSIDY FROM KING HUSSEIN.) THE CONVERSATION FOCUSED ON AL QUDS NEW ACTIVISM. (REFTEL.)

2. DAIBIS CONFIRMED THAT RECENT EDITORIALS REFLECT A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN BY AL QUDS TO PROVOKE A DEBATE AMONG PALESTINIANS UNDER OCCUPATION OF POLITICAL PRIORITIES AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE PLO. CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH MAY 15 ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE BRITISH MANDATE AND WILL RUN THROUGH JUNE ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIX-DAY WAR.

3. AL QUDS WILL ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT WEST BANK/GAZA CONSENSUS ON THREE POINTS: (1) THAT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE IS INDIVISIBLE, (2) THAT THE PLO REPRESENTS THEM, AND (3) THAT THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION MUST END. FIRST TWO POINTS ARE INTENDED TO DISARM CRITICS. THE REAL OBJECTIVE IS TO CREATE A WEST BANK/GAZA CONSENSUS THAT WILL RELEGATE OTHER QUESTIONS, E.G. PALESTINIAN STATE, RIGHTS OF REFUGEES, PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON, ETC TO SECONDARY STATUS, AND FOCUS ON ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

4. MORAL BASIS FOR MOVEMENT WILL BE WEST BANK/GAZA PALESTINIANS' CLAIM TO BE THE LARGEST PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY, THEIR PRESENCE IN PALESTINE AND THEIR 11 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH ISRAELIS.

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5. AL QUDS CAMPAIGN DOES NOT REFLECT SO MUCH OPTIMISM IN THE PEACE PROCESS, RATHER FEAR THAT BEGIN'S PEACE PLAN WILL BE IMPOSED UPON THE WEST BANK. DAIBIS BELIEVES LOCAL PALESTINIANS MUST ORGANIZA POLITICALLY TO RESIST.

6. ALTHOUGH SOME CONSULTATIONS PRECEDED CAMPAIGN, SUCCESS WILL DEPEND UPON RESPONSE FROM BROAD CROSS-SECTION OF LOCAL PALESTINIANS COMMUNITY. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THERE IS A SILENT MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF THE THREE POINTS AND THAT EVENTUALLY EVEN THE MAYORS WILL BE BROUGHT ALONG. ON THIS, DAIBIS WAS OPTIMISTIC. IF ONLY FREIJ AND OTHER TRADITIONAL MODERATES JOIN, THE CAMPAIGN WILL HAVE FAILED, HE SAID. DAIBIS SAID CONFIDENTIALLY THAT A DOCUMENT IS BEING PREPARED FOR SIGNATURES WHICH WILL FORMALIZE THE THREE POINTS.

7. DAIBIS DENIED ANY PRIOR CONTACTS WITH JORDAN OR EGYPT. HE SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE MOVEMENT BE VIEWED AS INDIGENOUS OTHERWISE IT WOULD BE DISCREDITED.

8. DAIBIS SUGGESTED THAT A FIRM AMERICAN LINE ON ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE HELPFUL IN MOTIVATING LOCAL PALESTINIANS

TO SPEAK OUT.

9. COMMENT: AL QUDS CLAIMS A CIRCULATION OF 20,000 ALTHOUGH THE REAL FIGURE IS PROBABLY ABOUT 12,000, STILL NEARLY DOUBBLE THE CIRCULATION OF EITHER ITS RIVALS AL FAJR OR ASH'AB. EACH COPY IS READ BY PERHAPS FIVE OR SIX PERSONS, SO PERHAPS ONE TENTH OF THE LOCAL POPULATION WILL BE DIRECTLY EXPOSED TO AL QUDS' THINKING. IN THE BACK OF HIS MIND, DAIBIS HAS THE EXAMPLE OF PEACE NOW AND OBVIOUSLY HOPES THE AL QUDS CAMPAIGN WILL GENERATE AN ARAB ANALOGUE. WE SHALL SEE. AS EXPLAINED REFTTEL, WE ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT DENIAL OF JORDANIAN INVOLVEMENT. HAD ANWAR AL KHATIB AUTHORED THE EDITORIALS RATHER THAN DAIBIS WE WOULD SEE AMMAN'S GUIDING HAND. AS IT IS, WE SUSPECT CONSULTATIONS RATHER THAN DIRECTION. DAIBIS
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HAS PROBABLY OVER-ESTIMATED THE ABILITY OF LIPSERVICE TO DEFLECT WHAT WILL PROBABLY BE A SHARP PLO COUNTER-ATTACK. TO PURSUE HIS LINE WILL INVOLVE REAL MORAL AND PERHAPS PHYSICAL COURAGE. DAIBIS, ABOUT 38, WAS BORN IN AZ ZABABIDAH NEAR JENIN. CATHOLIC. LOCALLY EDUCATED. HE HAS BEEN WITH AL QUDS FOR ABOUT 10 YEARS, BUT ALSO TEACHES AT ST GEORGES SCHOOL IN JERUSALEM.
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